

Dawn of a Decade



AS I TYPE THIS, I'M AT 41,000 feet on an American Airlines 777 flight returning home to Dallas/Fort Worth, still buzzing from a whirlwind trip to Los Angeles. I was there for the unveiling of Virgin Galactic's new spaceship, which is set to be the world's first commercial passenger spacecraft and which marks yet another definitive step toward the reality of space tourism. In true Virgin style, the invitation-only event in the Mojave Desert was dramatic and sexy, complete with dozens of media camera crews, celebrity sightings, and chic surroundings. It was a fantastic perk offered to the 300 paying customers – future astronauts, as Virgin Galactic calls them – who have already secured their seats for a trip to suborbital space.

For *Virtuoso*, the glitzy unveiling was the cherry on top of a four-day forum for our Accredited Space Agents, who are Virgin Galactic's official sales agents in the Americas. At the forum, ASAs underwent intensive product training; dined with test pilots who

regaled us with tales of the rigors of their jobs; received construction briefings from executives with Spaceport America in New Mexico; and much more.

For me, the forum revealed the passion and enthusiasm of all involved, from the pilots, engineers, and others dedicated to space tourism, to the Virtuoso travel advisors who offer the opportunity to reserve seats on the spaceship, and those paying clients who are ready to blast off. One of those customers is Virtuoso CEO Matthew Upchurch.

“Being able to look down at the thin blue line that is our planet's atmosphere, to look into the black of space, will be a life-changing event,” he says. “It's the ultimate travel experience.” To learn more, turn to page 24.

Until you're ready to break the bonds of Earth, there are lots of amazing experiences right here on terra firma. This issue is filled with articles on that perennial travel favorite, Europe. Whether it's exploring the Dolomites in Italy, skiing in Switzerland, or cruising to Cannes (talk about glitz), you'll find much to inspire you on this planet.

This year marks *Virtuoso Life's* tenth anniversary, which calls for a trip down memory lane. The magazine, the travel industry, and the world have changed dramatically in the last decade, and it's exciting to consider the possibilities – including space tourism – that await in the new one.



Nice ride: Virgin Galactic's new spaceship.

Elaine Srnka

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
esrnka@virtuoso.com

Virtuoso is a member of the World Travel & Tourism Council. The WTTC works to raise awareness of the importance of travel and tourism as one of the largest industries in the world, employing more than 220 million people worldwide and generating more than nine percent of global GDP.